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Why I stood with Obama on immigration reform

By Rhett Buttle

Last week, I joined small employers, business leaders, elected officials and advocates from across the country to stand with President Obama and call for immigration reform. Like the president, small business owners understand fixing our country's immigration system will foster a stronger, better-trained workforce, which will bolster their bottom lines and the economy as a whole. The time for smart, comprehensive immigration reform is now.

One of the small business owners who joined me was Muneer Baig—an immigrant from India who dreamed of opening his own company in America. Muneer got a minimum wage job, worked his way up through the ranks and saved his money until he had enough to start his own business. Today, he owns an IT company that provides governance, risk management and compliance services for a variety of clients, including the federal government. Now that his business has gotten off the ground, Muneer wants to hire. His company needs people with specialized skills, but he can't always find a local person with those abilities.

Muneer's story illustrates why fixing our immigration system is the right thing for the country and our economy. Everyone benefits when we allow hard-working immigrants to bring their skill sets to the U.S. so they can contribute to an existing company or even start their own. That's why increasing the number of visas for immigrants with specialized skills or advanced degrees and incentivizing those talented individuals to innovate and strengthen our economy should be no-brainers. It makes no sense to deny these individuals entry into our country—where they could strengthen our economy by working, innovating, starting new businesses and, perhaps, creating new jobs. We need immigration policies that give these immigrants a clear way to navigate opportunities to start and grow a business.

Small Business Majority recently released [opinion polling](#) that found the majority of small business owners feel the same way Muneer does, and see immigration reform as a crucial rung in the ladder to small business and overall economic success. A sweeping 87 percent of small employers believe our immigration system is broken, and a large majority support comprehensive immigration proposals currently on the table to fix it.

Like Muneer, they recognize the need to allow not only more high-skilled workers into this country, but more low-skilled workers, as well. When you look at their labor needs, it makes sense why they feel this way. One in five small business owners who have hired immigrants say it's because they can't find enough U.S. citizens to fill jobs.

At Thursday's speech, the president highlighted the bipartisan "Gang of Eight" immigration reform bill that was recently passed by the Senate as a smart bipartisan solution to our country's

broken immigration system. Small businesses support the plan, too. According to Small Business Majority's polling, 83 percent of small employers support increasing the number of visas for legal immigrants who have advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering or mathematics. Another 87 percent support requiring illegal immigrants with no criminal record to register for legal status, pass a background check, learn English, pay a fine and pay taxes. A vast three quarters agree we would be better off if people who are in the country illegally became legal taxpayers, so they pay their fair share and can work toward citizenship in the future. And three in four owners support revamping the guest worker system to create a new worker visa, eventually letting immigrants move beyond temporary status and switch employers to protect themselves against unscrupulous ones.

Small businesses strongly support comprehensive immigration reform. That's why I was honored to stand with the president and small employers from across the country to urge the House to take up the "Gang of Eight's" bill and pass it. All these reforms will help small business owners looking to employ immigrants feel more comfortable about their hires, give immigrants who want to become small business owners the opportunity to do so and put much-needed tax dollars into our country's coffers.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/188563-why-i-stood-with-obama-on-immigration-reform>